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COMING MEN IN ENGLAND.

BY JUSTIN M'CARTHY, M.P.

“Who are the coming men in England just now?” is a question often asked me of late. I think where the question has been put to me it generally bore reference to the coming men in politics, art, and letters; for I do not suppose any one would care much for my opinion as to the coming men in science. Only the other day some friends were discussing the question as to our next poet-laureate. Browning is dead and Tennyson is very old. The place must soon be vacant. Who is to fill it? We have absolutely no poet left of the order of Tennyson and Browning. Swinburne has shot his arrow higher than any other living rival, but although Swinburne has lately in his works been putting on loyalty like a garment, and adulating royalty as if he were already a court poet, yet the memory of some of his lyrical blasphemings is too strong, I should think, to allow him any chance of invitation to become the successor of Tennyson. William Morris is a sweet singer, and in his order a true poet; but he is too open and avowed a Social Democrat to have such a place offered to him; and he certainly would not accept it even if it were possible that it could be offered. We have then a little cluster of poets and poetesses; some very gifted and charming, but not one of them very strong or original. Besides, it has to be remembered that among the men I have mentioned, and among the men and women I am thinking of, there is none “coming.” All have come; have given their measure; have gone as far as they are likely to go. They are past middle life. If there be any young strong singer with originality and genius, I do not know of him; his song or his name has not reached my ears. The condition of things is much the same with the department of literature in which I am myself most directly concerned—I mean the novelist’s craft. Our really successful novelists, men and women, have come long ago; have been recognized by us for many years.

There is not one among them whose capacities and whose limitations are not perfectly well known to us all. It seems marvellous to me that so many really good novels should be produced in England every year ; and yet we have for years ceased to hear the sound of anything new.

But the world of politics is curiously different from the world of letters and art. In the political world of England a man can hardly ever be said to have given his measure. If Lord Palmerston had died at the age of sixty-five, the world would never have known that it had lost in him a really great Parliamentary orator. If Robert Lowe, now Lord Sherbrooke, had died at the age of fifty-five, just when his great battle against democratic reform was over, he would have been remembered as one of the most brilliant Parliamentary debaters that ever lived. From that time he dwindled away—or, as Carlyle says of somebody, he “dwindled upwards.” He faded into the House of Lords and was gone. Time sets hardly any limits to possibilities of late distinction or sudden decay in our political life. When we talk of coming men, therefore, we have to speak with caution and reserve. We have to speak of men who at this hour seem to be coming to the front. One dare not be confident; there are so many changes. A few, a very few, years ago, every one in and out of Parliament would have said that the coming man was Sir Charles Dilke. About the same time was there a single observer, however keen, who would have ventured to say that there was anything in Mr. Balfour? Yet again, about the same time, the almost universal judgment of the House of Commons—I for myself did not accept it—declared Mr. John Morley to be a hopeless Parliamentary failure,—a mere student and man-of-letters out of place. At the present moment the most powerful public man in England after Mr. Gladstone himself is unquestionably Mr. Parnell. But if Home Rule were carried, it is not at all unlikely that Mr. Parnell would withdraw from public life and be never more heard in politics. Some one who left England yesterday with his mind fully made up to the belief that Mr. Parnell is the coming man, and who lived away from civilization and newspapers for a few years, might come back to find Mr. Parnell’s political career already but a great memory.

Still, under all those reserves, we may tell of the politicians who seem to be the coming men. Every really influential poli-

tician in England is either in Parliament or intends to be there. In my younger days there were still influential public men who led their people from the platform and not from the House of Commons, and who never thought of going to Parliament. But it is not so now. A man of political capacity now has to go into the House of Commons. There has been for some years back a complete cessation of that long series of Parliamentary duels which had been going on uninterruptedly since the days of Bolingbroke. I am speaking of the succession of duels between the leader of the government and the leader of the opposition in which each leader was the greatest orator on his side of the house, and in which each rival was well worthy of the other. Bolingbroke and Walpole; Walpole and Pulteney; Henry Fox and the elder Pitt; a later and a far greater Fox and a later and not less great Pitt; Canning and Peel; and so on to Gladstone and Disraeli. Now for the time, though the fight is as fierce as ever, the duel of the leaders has ceased. There is no one on the Conservative side of the House whom any man would think of setting up as an oratorical rival to Mr. Gladstone. Lord Salisbury is the most powerful debater in the party, but he stands on an entirely lower level than that occupied so superbly by Disraeli; and in any case he is away in the House of Lords and cannot even cross swords with Gladstone. Coming men in that sense there are none—at least none that I can see. I do not see a coming Gladstone on the one side of the field or a coming Disraeli on the other.

But let us take our men as we have them; and men of very remarkable power and promise some of them undoubtedly are. Let us begin with the Conservatives, as they are the men in office. There can be little hesitation as to the name of the most rising man on the Conservative side of the House—his name is Arthur James Balfour. Mr. Balfour's rise in the House of Commons has been sudden and strange. He has been in Parliament for many years, and had to all appearance given the House of Commons full opportunities of finding out what manner of man he was. Everybody set him down as clever in a sort of priggish and feeble way; full of self-conceit and affectation; the sort of aristocratic and languid young politician to be much fondled and encouraged by some elderly duchess. Some observers thought there must be something in him, because, as they argued, a man could not have

all that appearance of self-conceit if there was not something or other to be self-conceited about. He made many speeches, all neatly and prettily turned, and wrought out in the most thoroughly approved academical fashion. Possibly it was in one sense rather against him than for him that Lord Salisbury was his uncle ; it set off too much his personal insignificance.

In 1880 the Conservative government suddenly appealed to the country and were defeated, and Mr. Gladstone came into office. Then Lord Randolph Churchill formed his famous Fourth Party. The Fourth Party consisted of four men—Lord Randolph himself, his close friend Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, Sir John Gorst, a clever lawyer and keen debater, and Arthur Balfour. The chief end and aim of that party was to worry the leaders on both sides, but more especially the leaders of the side to which the four Free Companions themselves belonged. It must have been a delightful task to Lord Randolph ; and, indeed, the whole four seemed to enjoy it. Balfour was most constant in his attendance and paid his due contribution of speeches. These were the days before any rules had been passed preventing or restricting obstruction, and we all made as many speeches as we liked. Mr. Balfour did his fair share of the obstructive work of his party, but he did not count for much in the opinion either of the party or of the House. I remember once likening the Fourth Party—it was in a speech I made in those days in the House of Commons—to the immortal Three Guardsmen and their suddenly-found companion, who afterwards became their leader, our dear old friend, D'Artagnan. The latter, of course, I identified with Lord Randolph Churchill ; Sir Henry Wolff with Athos ; Gorst I likened to Porthos, and Balfour to the sleek and self-complacent Aramis. The comparison told very well at the time. I noticed with some interest that it was afterwards reproduced in several newspaper articles without quotation marks or any reference to original authorship. Through all these years of the Fourth Party, and through all the limitless opportunities they gave for a man to show great political ability if he had it, Mr. Balfour never made any mark.

In 1886 the Tories came back to office, and, of course, they found it necessary to buy up the Fourth Party. So Sir Henry Wolff was dispatched on a mission to Cairo, and the other three free-lances were made members of the government. I do not

know if there is in Parliamentary history any other instance of a whole Parliamentary party being swallowed up and put out of existence in a single day. Mr. Balfour was made president of the Local-Government Board, and did not in the least advance his Parliamentary reputation. The Tory government were not strong in numbers; their fate depended altogether on the vote of the Irish members: the Irish members combined with the Liberals on an important motion and the Tories were turned out. Then came in Mr. Gladstone, and then came the Home-Rule motion and its defeat in the House of Commons, and the general elections and the return of Lord Salisbury to office,—and soon began the real career of Mr. Balfour. Mr. Balfour was made Secretary for Scotland in the first instance, and in that office he had nothing particular to do. And I well remember a snowy night in the winter—it was about the Christmas time of 1886—when I was visited in a New York hotel by a reporter for one of the daily papers to bring me the news that Mr. Balfour had been made Chief Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant,—in other words, Secretary for Ireland,—and to ask me what I thought about the appointment.

I confess that I thought it seemed like some stroke of droll humor in one of Mr. Gilbert's most topsy-turvy pieces. Mr. Balfour now was to stand up in the House of Commons and face Gladstone, Harcourt, Morley, Parnell, Sexton, William O'Brien, Healy! It looked ridiculous. All the same, the appointment made Mr. Balfour. It turned him into a Parliamentary debater from having been a college-debating-society prig. He has become one of the best debaters in the House. It is needless to say that in describing him as a success I am not describing his Irish policy as successful. I am speaking of the debater, and not of the statesman. I do not yet know—nobody knows—whether Mr. Balfour is a statesman or not. He has not had an opportunity given him of showing any claims to statesmanship. He has undertaken an impossible task—to govern Ireland at the present day by coercion. For such a task as that statesmanship is of no use; brains are of no use: Jack would be as good as his master; an idiot as good as a sage. Statesmanship will not enable a man to walk up a wall, or to jump over his own shadow. But what Mr. Balfour had an opportunity of proving was his capacity for debate, and he has proved it. He is by far the best debater on the Treasury benches. It is all but impossible that he should not come before

long to be leader of the House of Commons, if the Tories continue in power. He surely is, to all appearance, a coming man. I should think that for the work of really great statesmanship he would be found wanting in sympathy, just as, so far as we can make out, he is disqualified for genuine eloquence by want of imagination. But he is a man with a future. To be nothing in the House of Commons for a dozen years, and then suddenly to get up and become the leader of the House is an achievement to be noted in political history. It is to Mr. Balfour's advantage, too, that he is for the present relieved from any dread of rivalry on the part of his old colleague and leader, Lord Randolph Churchill. That amusing politician jumped off the coach in the hope of upsetting it and hurting somebody, and the coach went on just as well, or better, without him. He had his tumble for his pains. I do not believe he is extinguished by any means. I am sure he is inextinguishable. But his light is dim for the moment.

It seems strange to speak of Sir William Harcourt as a coming man. He is more than sixty-two years of age ; he has been more than twenty years in the House of Commons ; he has held various high administrative offices ; has been Home Secretary ; has been Chancellor of the Exchequer. And yet I do not know how any one could now describe him as other than one of the coming men. For he has never been leader of the House of Commons ; he has never been Prime Minister ; and his chances of becoming one or both have suddenly grown greater than ever they were before. He has changed his opinions with such astounding rapidity that no one can be surprised if there is in many political circles a certain doubt of his sincerity. But the one great question on which he changed his opinions is a question on which other men whose sincerity nobody has ever doubted have changed their opinions, too, and as quickly as he. If he had gone over to the anti-Gladstone side,—for that is what it is,—he would have been hailed with delight. If he had consented to take office under the Tories,—as his old colleague, Mr. Goschen, did,—he might have had almost any position he coveted. But he chose to remain with Mr. Gladstone, and has therefore had to sit in the cold shade of opposition for three years already. He is, above all things, a splendid fighter. He can always show the House sport—and Bolingbroke declared that the House of Com-

mons always likes the man who can show it sport. During the last two or three sessions he has done nearly all the real fighting of the party; at least, almost all that Mr. Gladstone could not find time and strength to do. He has had the good sense to be assiduous in his attendance in the House, and, as Mr. Gladstone is no longer allowed to keep late hours there, all the rough battle of the latter part of the sitting is led by Sir William Harcourt.

We are constantly asking who is to be the next leader of the Liberal party, or, rather, who is to be intrusted with the duty of leading the party when Mr. Gladstone cannot attend. A Radical member said to me last session: "I don't see any good in arguing the question. The man who is leading is the leader; and can any one doubt that Harcourt leads us?" That is one of the reasons why I speak of Sir William Harcourt as still a coming man. Had I been writing on this same subject three years ago, I should not even have mentioned his name.

There can be no doubt of the great intellectual power of Mr. John Morley. Mr. Morley is, after Mr. Gladstone, the man of most powerful intellect in the English Liberal party. Every one believes in his sincerity. He is becoming immensely popular in the country and on great provincial platforms. I am assured that he stands next to Mr. Gladstone in popularity. He has not as yet had very long experience of Parliamentary life, and, according to all the regular good old maxims of Parliamentary wisdom, he entered it too late for success. The one only comment which has to be made on the application of that maxim to him is that he *is* a success. There cannot be any possible doubt on the subject. He is the only man on the front opposition bench who could dispute the leadership with Sir William Harcourt. He has greatly improved of late in debating skill and power; and, indeed, I think every speech he makes is an improvement on the speech he made just before. An orator, perhaps, he could never be; but there is an eloquence of exalted thought put into noble language which sometimes carries the sympathetic listener away, as if he were under the spell of the born orator's enchantment. There is a sort of charm, I think, about that look of the student, of the recluse even, which Mr. Morley still retains, and always, perhaps, is destined to retain. He seems like some gowned scholar in a camp. If he fails to become a successful statesman of the higher order, I think it will be because he wants hopefulness; because

he is inclined to a certain pessimism in politics; because his tendency is rather to believe that things will go wrong than to feel assured that they must come right. He lacks animal spirits; and it would be hard indeed to overrate the importance of animal spirits in the big struggles, the rough-and-tumble fights, of English Parliamentary life. I have heard it said that he cannot be a successful leader because he dislikes speech-making; because he makes speeches as a matter of duty; because his first impulse is to sit still, while the first impulse of a different sort of man would be to rise to his feet. But I do not think there is much in that. The most successful party leader the House of Commons has known in late years hates speech-making quite as much as Mr. Morley does, and only gets on his feet when he feels that it would not be right to remain silent: I mean, of course, Mr. Parnell, who has managed to make a little handful of men do the work of a great army.

And Mr. Labouchère—what of him? Is he not a coming man? “Alas! I know not,” as *Hamlet* says. Mr. Labouchère is a coming man if he really wants to come. He has many advantages. He is, in the first place, a man of great talent; he is, in the next place, a man of great courage; and he is, in the third place,—and this counts for a good deal in English political life,—a rich man. He can take a high place if he will. But he must first get the average Englishman to take him seriously; and will he care to do that? Even if he begins to try it, will he not get tired of the effort and give it up? Will he ever be able to resist the temptation of startling the ordinary British Philistine and making him “sit up”? I believe Mr. Labouchère to be a perfectly sincere man in politics, as in other things. I believe he has a profound conviction of his democratic code. I cannot fancy his being afraid of anything. I believe he has that generous weakness which makes a man instinctively inclined to champion a cause when it is weak, to help a man who is down. But Mr. Labouchère has so long amused himself and the world by playing the part of a cynic and a political *farceur* that I am not certain whether he would be able to get rid of the stage attire and consent to be himself. The working democracy certainly believe in him. He is tremendously cheered on all democratic platforms. Perhaps the consciousness which must grow on him more and more—the consciousness of that serious power behind him—may

bring him at last to play openly and avowedly his own serious part. I say to play it "openly and avowedly"; for I believe he has always been playing it seriously to himself. Let him play it openly, avowedly, to the House of Commons and to the country, and I do not see what is to prevent him from being one of the first and foremost of the coming men.

Mr. Labouchère's political colleague, Mr. Bradlaugh, is, to all appearances, a coming man. Mr. Bradlaugh has carefully cultivated the House of Commons. He came in with the reputation of being, among other things, a great platform orator—a very Boanerges of the East-End meeting and the provincial meeting. He has a powerful form and a most tremendous voice. When, after a long struggle, he was at last allowed to take his seat in peace, the House assumed that it was in for frequent and ponderous rhetorical exertations. Mr. Bradlaugh gave the House nothing of the kind. He never, so far as I know, made a long speech. He always goes straight to the point, and when he has said what he wants to say he always sits down. He is really a very eloquent and powerful speaker, with a remarkably impressive voice, and it must be a temptation to such a man to let himself fully out now and then. But Mr. Bradlaugh is always concise, and the House now knows perfectly well that he, at least, will never bore his audience. Then he has devoted himself very closely to what we call the "business of the House"—to committees, and private bills, and all that sort of work which your popular orator generally disdains with a lofty disdain—and the House likes a man who looks after its work. Moreover, he is a man of the most winning courtesy of manner. He has disarmed the dislike of all his former political and religious opponents—and he had a good many of them—by his anxiety to oblige, by his willingness to make graceful concessions, by his genial toleration of difference of opinion. He is, I should think, destined before long to be a member of a Liberal administration, and even of a Liberal cabinet.

Any American who really knows England's political and social life, and who has known both for the last ten or a dozen years, will agree with me that such a probability—such a possibility even—is a marvellous phenomenon in English political history. It is not so many years since Mr. Bradlaugh, struggling like a man fighting for dear life, was dragged out of the lobby of the House of Commons, dragged down the stairs of the members' private

entrance, and thrust into Palace Yard by a whole cluster of policemen. No such scene had ever before taken place in our generation. The one which nearest preceded it was when the gallant seaman, Lord Cochrane, afterwards Earl of Dundonald,—one of the very last of the old brood of sea-kings,—escaped from the prison where he was lodged on an unjust charge, and boldly assumed his place in the House of Commons; was ordered to be removed, resisted with all his gigantic strength, and was dragged away at last by sheer force of numbers, carrying with him a large portion of the woodwork of the bench to which he was clinging in a desperate spirit of resistance. Cochrane afterwards passed into the House of Lords. I venture to predict that Mr. Bradlaugh will pass into a Liberal cabinet. And, as Mistress Meg Dods says in Scott's romance, "What for no?"

What of Sir Charles Russell, the great advocate—the greatest advocate the English bar has known since the beginning of the century? Is he a coming man? Has he any higher point to reach? He may, of course, in time become Lord Chancellor. Up to the present the office of Lord Chancellor cannot be held in England by a Roman Catholic, and Sir Charles Russell is a Roman Catholic. But no one doubts that, if the Liberals came into office, they would abolish this absurd and anomalous restriction—abolish it, perhaps, even for the mere sake of enabling the office to be tendered to Sir Charles Russell. But would that greatly enhance his position? A Lord Chancellor goes out of office with his party, and then he becomes a mere peer and can never go back to the bar—can never again play the part which made him great. "Gout and a peerage at fifty" Disraeli describes as the success of the bar. Was there ever in recent times a man who retained any real power in politics after he had become Lord Chancellor? At one time a dethroned Lord Chancellor did in some instances retain his influence over the House of Lords and even the political world; but in our time the acceptance of the office means something like "evaporation"—to use the phrase applied in the reign of the second George to a public man put out of sight by a moment of high place. If I do not call Sir Charles Russell a coming man, it is only because I do not see anything he has yet to come to which can put him any higher than the position which by universal consent he already occupies in England.

I should feel inclined to reckon Mr. Henry Fowler among the

coming men of the House of Commons. The name of Mr. Fowler is not, I fancy, much known in the United States. But he is a very rising public man. He is a lawyer and a banker ; he naturally understands affairs well, and he is an admirable debater,—if not even an orator,—with an impressive manner and a strong and musical voice. He held office under Mr. Gladstone's leadership, but he had no great chance of distinguishing himself. Lately he has been coming more to the front. Of course there are several men in the House of whom much might be expected. Take a man like Professor Bryce, for example—who is to say how far such a man may not go ? But such men are not at the present time coming men, according to my reading of the words and their significance ; they are not to the front just now ; they are not doing anything in particular ; nobody is talking about them. I have purposely refrained from saying anything about my own countrymen and colleagues—except for the few words I have said about Mr. Parnell. I have said nothing about men like Lord Rosebery and Lord Spencer, because I am convinced that the time has gone by when England could really be governed by a member of the House of Lords. Even if Lord Spencer or Lord Rosebery should ever become nominally Prime Minister,—quite a likely thing in both cases,—yet the man would not really have advanced one step beyond his present position. The ruling spirit in the House of Commons must rule the country.

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.